

COMMUNITY VOICES AMID A PANDEMIC



Just like our world, our nation and our state, the Bemidji community has not been immune to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Lives have been interrupted and schedules have been sidetracked. Though we know this situation is temporary, extra hand washing, social distancing and an abundance of time at home remind us that we've had to relearn how to go about our everyday lives for the time being. Though as of Tuesday afternoon there are still no reported cases of COVID-19 in Beltrami County, individuals in all fields of our community have adjusted to a national crisis. Through challenges, fears and the unknown, they cling to support, any sense of normalcy and hope. These are their voices. *Continued on Page A6*

Pictured clockwise from top left: Mandy Frizzell, stylist; Matt Valentine, bar manager; Lisa Rother, bakery owner; Mike Gregg, plumber; Tricia Andrews, music and arts executive director; Troy Hendricks, activities director; Hugh Welle, bank president; and Christine Christiansen, educator. Photos by Annalise Braught, Jillian Gandsey and Hannah Olson / Bemidji Pioneer

Seeking alternate accommodations

BSU requires students to move out of residence halls

By Annalise Braught
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BEMIDJI — Students at Bemidji State were thrown for another loop this past weekend when the swift decision was made to have all on-campus students move out of the residence halls.

An email was sent to

students on the evening of March 18 stating that the residence halls would remain open to ensure all students had a place to live. But things didn't stay that way for long.

Another email was sent out around 5:30 p.m. on Friday evening, March 20, informing students they had until 5 p.m. on Monday, March 23, to move out of their dorms.

"In support of national efforts to 'flatten the curve' of community transmission of the coronavirus, we need to mini-

mize the number of students living on our campus," the email said. "This leads us to take the strong action of closing our residence halls, effective at 5 p.m. on Monday, March 23. We recognize that this action creates yet another major disruption for our students and regret that it is necessary."

Andy Bartlett, executive director of communication and marketing at BSU, said that they made the quick decision based

BSU: Page A7



Annalise Braught / Bemidji Pioneer
BSU freshman Jennifer Hornseth, left, and Helen Mladý were two of the many students loading up their belongings on Monday outside of Oak Hall.

Tutto Bene reinvents itself in the midst of COVID-19

By Bria Barton
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BEMIDJI — Just minutes after Governor Walz announced the temporary closure of restaurants and bars to dine-in customers due to the coronavirus on March 16 — leaving many food establishments scrambling for a plan of action — Tutto Bene was already at the forefront of the takeout option. Upon unveiling a newly designed website and menu, the upscale Italian eatery made it known that it was prepared to continue catering to customers' palates with handcrafted dishes — even if those dishes now had to be boxed, bagged and sent on a car ride to somebody else's kitchen.

"Up until now, takeout had been a very, very, very small part of our business model because we're a sit-down restaurant and one of the few fine dining restaurants in town," Justin Frederick, co-owner of Tutto Bene, said. "But this is a completely different animal — and all of a sudden. So we had to ramp up certain parts of our system to be able to go solely to takeout." Frederick, who owns Tutto Bene with his wife Jerusa, had begun planning for Gov. Walz's mandate a week prior to it. Originally from the Twin Cities, he said his connections to chefs and restaurateurs in larger cities around the country helped him foresee the coming

changes because "we're a week behind them on what's going on — more or less as far as Minneapolis is concerned." So when the governor finally did make the announcement, Frederick was prepared to "press the launch button" on his restaurant's temporary switch to takeout. "I've been in this industry for two decades now," Frederick said. "I've been through 2008. I've been through 9/11. I've been through major events in our country and the world in this industry. And I've never seen a shock-wave like this. This is unprecedented. There's no script for this." Frederick made the

TUTTO BENE: Page A7



Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer
Justin Frederick, co-owner of Tutto Bene, puts together their gnocchi and pesto dish on Thursday, March 19, at the restaurant.

OBITUARIES

Tips for homeschool teachers

As we wait out COVID-19, teaching our kids at home will be a challenge. By following the procedures given by your local school district and taking into consideration these homeschooling tips, which will be printed in each edition of the Pioneer, we hope your new role as a homeschool teacher will be a bit easier.



JOHN EGGRS
Education

1. Have your children dedicate the rest of the year to someone. It could be to a friend or parent or grandparent. When we do things for someone else, we do a

- better job. Post the name on the refrigerator.
2. Each day, along with your child, set a goal to accomplish. If they don't accomplish it today, keep it for the next day. Give them a target to shoot for.
3. At the end of the day or lesson, ask your kids what they learned. It doesn't have to be a repeat of everything. If they mention just a few

things, that will tell you that they were paying attention to whatever they were doing. Until next time, remember, your kids have the potential of learning anything. With you as their teacher, they are in good hands. You can do it and we will get through this together.

John R. Eggers of Bemidji is a former university professor and area principal. He also is a writer and public speaker.

TUTTO BENE

From Page A1

decision to discontinue Tutto Bene's lunch hours – instead, giving sole focus to its dinner service – but the restaurant's menu remained mostly the same. However, he knew some of the dishes wouldn't travel well in to-go boxes, so he substituted them for more “bulletproof” items.

These dishes would ensure that once a customer got home and put their meal on a plate – or just ate it out of the box – they would be getting the same food representation that they would get if they were dining in the restaurant.

“As far as the portion sizes and the integrity of what we're putting into that box, it's the same as if I was doing it for somebody sitting in the restaurant. So we haven't cut any corners in that department,” Frederick said.

The restaurant is also offering a 15% discount on all orders, and the response from customers has been “humbling and overwhelming,” Frederick said.

“We decided to go all the way and remain open for our staff and for our customers,” Frederick said. “We understand people out there are hurting and watching their money, too. So we're trying to do



Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer
Tutto Bene's gnocchi and pesto dish before the prosciutto is added in.

what we can – you know, a give-and-take kind of relationship.”

But not everything has been easy for Tutto Bene. Frederick had to lay off his entire front of house staff, and the restaurant is now functioning with just around 40% of its typical crew.

“I didn't have a choice. There's nothing for them to do, so with a very heavy heart, we had to temporarily lay them off,” Frederick said. “We are in contact with them, and they all have their jobs back the second this goes away.”

The restaurant is also adjusting to the challenge of implementing safeguards to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. Frederick said they're having to spread out orders to help customers practice social distancing when arriving for their meals.

“We're trying to avoid

20 people standing in the lobby waiting, so my front of house manager and I are being very strategic in telling people what times they can come pick it up,” Frederick said. “We are hyper-aware of not having too many people walk in that door at the same time to get their food.”

And while the restaurant and bar closures are set to expire at 5 p.m. on Friday, March 27, Frederick is expecting the mandate to be extended over the next six to eight weeks.

He also predicts a change in the landscape of dining culture by the end of the health crisis.

“I don't think a lot of places are going to be able to weather the storm,” Frederick said. “The big corporate places are always going to be fine. It's the mom-and-pop, independent, smaller res-

taurants and bars – who don't have that corporate design, structure and resources – that are going to have the challenging time.”

But as of now – preferring to take his business day by day – Frederick said he's mainly concerned with covering his restaurant overhead and food expenses as well as keeping his current staff employed.

“I'm planning on things not going back to normal for quite a while,” Frederick said. “Personally, I'm not making money. I just want to have it be a zero-sum game, like a nonprofit organization, at this point.”

Nevertheless, Frederick remains hopeful that – with the backing and generosity of the community – restaurants and bars around town will persevere through this time of unprecedented challenges.

“We all need to embrace each other and get through this together, which is what I love about Bemidji. That's why we moved up here and bought this restaurant – to be part of a community,” Frederick said. “Everybody just needs to take a deep breath. Hug the ones you love, and we'll just take it one day at a time because that's all we're promised anyway.”

Bria Barton is a Travel and Tourism reporter for Forum Communications Co. She can be reached at (218) 333-9798.

Jim Skerik



It is with great sadness that we inform you of the passing of Jim Charley Skerik, 81, of Debs, Minn. who passed away Friday, March 20, 2020, after a short furious battle with pancreatic cancer at his home.

Private family services will be held at the Cease Family Funeral Home in Bemidji with Pastor Mike Naylor officiating.

Interment will be in the spring at the Pinewood Buzzle Cemetery in Pinewood, MN.

Jim was born January 20, 1939, in Bemidji, MN the son of Joseph and Bertha (Roen) Skerik. He married the love of his life and best friend, Judy Dunn on March 22, 1958. Jim farmed his entire life. He also drove a school bus for 43 accident free years, and was a volunteer fireman for Alaska Township Volunteer Fire Department. Jim worked at Erickson, Hellickson, and Vye Lumberyard and later United Building Center for 25 years. He hauled gravel for the county, skidded in wood, and helped out his neighbors and friends. In his spare time he collected and restored tractors. Jim is now resting peacefully with his puppies Taffy and Tiny. Jim was a beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, uncle, and friend.

He is survived by his:

Wife, Judy Skerik of Debs, MN,
Children, Rick (Bev) Skerik of Hawaii,
Roxann (Nic) Lopez of Bemidji,
Pam (Dan) Nelson of Oregon,
Paul (Melody) Skerik of Pinewood,
Jestine (Erik) Hyrkas of Oakdale,
18 Grandchildren, and 19 Great-Grandchildren,
Brothers, Lester Skerik of Pinewood,
Donald (Darlene) Skerik of Pinewood,
Sisters, Arlene (Dick) Johnson of Penguilly,
Frances Skerik of Bemidji,
and numerous nephews and nieces.
He was preceded in death by his parents, brother Joe, and sister Gladys.

Condolences may be left at ceasefuneralhome.com.

Nancy Heller

July 10, 1931 - March 20, 2020

BEMIDJI, Minn. - Nancy Heller, 88, Pinewood, Minn., died Friday, March 20, in Sanford Bemidji Medical Center.

Private services will be held.

Arrangements by Cease Family Funeral Home in Bemidji.

Barbara Phelps

Jan. 8, 1945 - March 21, 2020

FARGO, N.D. - Barbara Phelps, 75, Bemidji, Minn., died Saturday, March 21, in Sanford Medical Center.

Memorial services will be held at a later date.

Arrangements by Cease Family Funeral Home in Bemidji.

BSU

From Page A1

on the circumstances at the time.

“We have been responding to advice from the Minnesota Department of Health and the (Minnesota State) System Office, to try to reduce the number of people we have on our campus,” Bartlett explained. “And once all of the employees started working from home, our largest concentration of people were in the residence halls. So just for everyone's safety it made sense to close the halls.”

He said the decision was made as fast as possible, while still understanding that some students wouldn't be able to make it just over the weekend, which is why the deadline was set at 5 p.m. on Monday.

The email also informed students that were not currently in Bemidji, not to return to the residence halls for the rest of the spring semester, except to retrieve their belongings. Anyone who was unable to get their things by the deadline would have their rooms locked and would be able to pack them up at a future date.

Freshman Helen Mladý of Corpus Christi, Texas, and Jennifer Hornsteth of Rochester were two of the many students frantically packing their belongings on Monday.

Mladý said that because of the short notice she had to rent a storage unit in town and is flying home to Texas with just one checked bag, and will have to come back for the rest of her things at a later date.

“I was completely last minute,” Mladý said as she loaded the trunk of her sedan. “They told us we could stay for the



BSU freshman Lauren McComas and her mother, Lisa McComas, load up her belongings on Monday outside of Oak Hall.

rest of the semester if we wanted to, and her and I were just going to stay because I didn't want to have to fly back home with everything going on.”

She said the two of them were planning on staying because it felt safer than traveling home where the virus is worse than it is here.

“I'm nervous about flying back too, because I have a few steps, one in Minneapolis and one in Detroit,” Mladý said.

Though classes are suspended until March 30, the students said they both still have assignments and exams due by the end of this week.

“In the middle of all this moving, we don't really have time to be dealing with all of that,” Hornsteth said. “It just sucks, because I came here for my degree so I wouldn't have to do online classes, and now I do anyway.”

Nursing freshman Lauren McComas of Mar-

shall, Miss., was home on spring break when the news came they had to be out of their dorms in just a few short days.

“So, we drove up to the cities yesterday, and came up here today to get her stuff,” her mother, Lisa McComas, explained as she loaded Lauren's belongings into their truck bed.

“I was also in the CNA program at Sanford, which has obviously been cut short now too, and I still haven't taken my state test for it,” Lauren said.

Isaiah Haakenson, a fifth-year senior in the English program said he was relieved when they got the email saying they could stay in the dorms. “But then that all changed on Friday when they said they were closing the dorms down after all,” Haakenson said as he packed up his room on Monday afternoon.

Haakenson explained that since he works in

Bemidji, he didn't want to have to quit his job to move back to his hometown of New London, Minn., so he began looking for places to live as soon as the news came in.

“I didn't really want to have to try and find an apartment for just the few months that I would be sticking around here, so I was really struggling with where to go and what to do,” Haakenson said.

He said thankfully a friend of his who was moving back home because of the whole situation had a few months left on his lease, which now Haakenson will be able to finish out.

“Since his lease is up in June, that gives me a couple of months to figure out what to do next,” Haakenson said.

Bartlett explained that around 70 students are still living in halls due to emergency circumstances. He said most of them being international students who are unable

to travel home. Others are not able to go home because of the potential of infecting a family member who is at risk. He also said that students with jobs as healthcare workers or first responders in the community have been allowed to stay as well.

One thing that has many students worried who have moved out is if they will be refunded, and if so, how that will take place.

“They haven't announced yet how we will get any kind of refund yet for our dorms, parking passes or food,” Haakenson said. “For some of us, we've already paid for our meal plans and dorms and now we also have to pay for our first month's rent super short notice.”

He continued saying that even if they don't get the money back soon, it would at least be helpful for them to know what to communicate with their landlords in an effort to be able to work something else out.

“At least just something to give us an idea of how we can get through this financially,” Haakenson said.

Bartlett said that the reason they have not made an official announcement on the subject yet is because they are still waiting on some finalized guidance from the Minnesota State System Office on how to handle refunds.

“There is something that we have done in the past week or so that has been easy,” Bartlett said. “We know there will be consequences, even unintended consequences, to all of these kinds of things. But everything we have done has been with the safety of our students and our community first and foremost.”

Bartlett said that the faculty is working hard to switch all classes to an online format this week in preparation for classes to resume on Monday.

Annalise Braught is the managing editor at the Pioneer. She can be reached at (218) 333-9796.

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

Wednesday, March 25

7	9	4	3	6	5	2	1	8
6	2	1	9	8	4	5	3	7
5	3	8	7	1	2	4	6	9
4	7	3	5	9	8	6	2	1
8	6	2	1	4	3	9	7	5
1	5	9	2	7	6	3	8	4
2	1	5	8	3	9	7	4	6
9	4	7	6	2	1	8	5	3
3	8	6	4	5	7	1	9	2

JUMBLE

FOAMY
SEIZE
NOTION
GAMBIT

The wedding cake looked delicious and would be eaten "INGEST" A MOMENT